

# Changes in Family and Household during China's Rapid Economic Development

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## Extended abstract

China started a nationwide economic reform and opened to the world in the late 1970s. This has led to a rapid economic development and accelerated the process of westernization and modernization. For example, China has now become the second major economic power in the world. The number of Chinese cities increased from 193 in 1979 to 668 in 1997. People's living standards and education level improved significantly. During this process, people's attitudes toward marriage and family have changed greatly which inevitably affected their household formation behaviors. Moreover, China further strengthened its family planning program through widely implement the one-child policy in urban and many rural areas in the late 1970s and 1980s. These resulted in a notable increase in age at marriage and a significant decrease in fertility. Since the early 1990s, China's fertility fell to the level of below replacement and has stayed at this or a lower level since.

All these changes have significant changes on Chinese families and households. Many activities that people engaged in are closely related to their family and household, as the family and household are the building blocks of human society. In the past thirty

years, Chinese families have experienced great change. In Heilongjiang provinces, for example, households have become smaller and nuclearized. Mean household size dropped from 4.49 in 1982 to 2.84 in 2010 and the proportions of one-generation households in 2010 is three times higher than in 1982. Despite that, however, changes in household structure have not been systematically explored. For instance, there is indication that the proportion of the three-generation households did not change and that there are fewer old people living in complex family households than before, but their reasons have not been carefully examined. This study will fill this gap and provide a systematic examination on these issues.

This study will use data collected by China's 1982, 1990, 2000 and 2010 census. Among them, the data for 1982 and 1990 are 1 percent census samples and for 2000 are the 1 thousandth census sample. Because the detailed census data of the 2010 are not yet available, only some tabulated results for will be used. These census data contain basic individual level information such as date of birth, sex of the household members, their relationship to household head, marital status, education attainment, and registration information and so on.

In this study both individual and household will be used as the unit of analysis. Differing from the family which is defined as a group of people whose members are related through blood and marriage relationship, a household is often defined as a group of people who live together and have a same budget. It may include people who are not related through blood or marriage relationship. In this study, we have included all family households, while collective households are excluded. Because of the

restriction imposed by the data, we have used a slightly modified Hammel & Laslett's household classification scheme to classify households by structure.

In this study, we have used conventional demographic and statistical analysis to examine changes in household composition, people's household formation behaviours, their variations across different regions and population groups, and major factors that are related to or have contributed to these changes and variations. The study will provide a detailed description of changes in Chinese household formation and composition during the past 30 years, and the major characteristics of contemporary Chinese household. It will also address a number of theoretical issues related to changes in Chinese families and households.